

OUR COUNTRY

A Notable Address by BAINBRIDGE COLBY, of New York

Delivered at Chicago January 10th, 1916

Published by the National Security League Upon the Opening of Its National Conference in Washington, D. C., as a Call for a Revived and Awakened Patriotism.

You do me too much honor, Mr. Chairman, in asking me to speak tonight to the august sentiment, "Our Country," and you also, my friends, in permitting me, with my insufficient powers, to try to find expression for the thought and feeling of the hour.

Never did "Country" speak to Americans more appealingly, and never has it been so imperatively the duty of our statesmen to hearken unto the true voice of America, sounding clear and vibrant, amidst the stridencies of ignorance and sophistry and cant.

OUR COUNTRY—DO WE LOVE IT?

I was talking recently with a distinguished tourist from abroad. It was at the conclusion of his visit, and he was commenting after the manner of foreign visitors upon our institutions and our national outlook. He seemed particularly impressed by the great tide of immigration pouring through our gateways, and its effect upon our citizenship. "These newcomers," said he, "with few exceptions do not love America. They love its body, not its soul. They appreciate the relative ease of making a living, and the higher plane of comfort upon which existence is possible, but they know nothing of your history, of the genius of your institutions, of the true meaning of America."

This was said with the cocksureness which a brief sojourn and a rapid survey of America seem to inspire in foreign visitors. But true words are often spoken not only in jest, but in a hurried observation.

If the charge is true in a degree, of our naturalized citizenship, is it wholly untrue of our native citizens?

WHAT IS "OUR COUNTRY"?

Other lands are as fair to look upon. Nature has not reserved her bounty for us alone. Other nations can boast a domain larger than ours, and many have a longer history.

What is Our Country? What vision does it call up? Is it certain that we see more than its material form and outlines—its thriving commerce, its bulging store-houses, its teeming population? Have we caught the true significance of Our Country? Do we love it in spirit and in truth?

AMERICA'S PAST IS GLORIOUS BECAUSE OF THE GLORIOUS DEEDS OF HER SONS

The voice of America is heard in their utterances. The aspirations of Our Country are seen in their lives. Search their lives and words, and you shall find the authentic note of America.

GEORGE WASHINGTON—WHEN THIS WAS A LITTLE COUNTRY

There was a time when this was a little country, and girt about with foes. But we did not flinch. When the oppressive laws of the mother country left no doubt of England's resolve to break the spirit and the fortunes of the colonists, George Washington quietly appeared in the Continental Congress, clothed in the blue and buff uniform of a Virginia colonel, and he wore it from that day until finally called to the command of the army before Boston. Here spoke our country. In unmistakable accents by the simple example of the calmest and bravest of her sons, she stated her belief that the time for action had come, and that no more time should be wasted on humble petitions for the redress of grievances, to a Parliament resolved on war.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

Thomas Jefferson spoke the voice of Our Country, when a little later he said:

"IT IS NOT TO THE MODERATION AND JUSTICE OF OTHERS we are to trust for fair and equal access to market with our productions, or for our due share in the transportation of them, BUT TO OUR OWN MEANS OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE FIRM WILL TO USE THEM."

JOHN ADAMS

No less did President John Adams voice the true America when, in his message of 1798, he said:

"In demonstrating by our conduct that we do not fear war in the necessary protection of our rights and honor, we shall give no room to infer that we abandon the desire of peace. AN EFFICIENT PREPARATION FOR WAR CAN ALONE SECURE PEACE."

JOSEPH STORY

When France, during the Napoleonic struggle, was violating our ports, seizing our ships and despoiling our citizens, it was Joseph Story, the jurist and expounder of the Constitution, then a student in Harvard, who composed a patriotic ode, still treasured by Harvard men as one of the university's contributions to the history of Our Country:

"Shall Gallia's clan our coast invade,
With hellish outrage scourge the main,
Insult our nation's neutral trade,
And we not dare our rights maintain?"

PINCKNEY'S HISTORIC PHRASE

And in more laconic phrase, but with equal vigor, the celebrated Pinckney uttered those words which will never die:

"Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute."

The men who founded our liberties with a mailed hand detested war as the most futile of follies. "My first wish," said Washington, "is to see this plague of mankind banished from the earth." But they abhorred dishonor more. An affront to our dignity, a violation of Our Country's rights they would discuss, indeed, with a certain grave but limited patience, hastening unmistakably to the demand for unqualified disavowal and prompt satisfaction.

DECATUR

The voice of Our Country was heard in Decatur's reply to the arrogant Bey of Algiers, when America resolved to put an end to piracy in the Mediterranean. The Barbary States, it will be recalled, had levied tribute upon the shipping of the world for centuries. The most powerful maritime nations, England and France, had for two hundred years paid tribute. America refused. And when Commodore Decatur and his squadron appeared to demand the release of Americans held as slaves by the Barbary States, and indemnification for past outrages, the Bey asked for time to consider the question. It was denied. Then Decatur was asked to concede only three hours. "Not a minute," said the American Commodore, and the quarterdeck of his flagship was instantly the scene of an historic capitulation.

CALHOUN

It was for Our Country that Calhoun spoke in 1811, when, after a recital of the extent, duration and character of the injuries received by us at England's hands, the failure of peaceable means for redressing those injuries, the laws passed professedly to regulate our trade with other nations, negotiations resorted to time after time until they became hopeless, he said:

"WHICH SHALL WE DO, ABANDON OR DEFEND OUR OWN COMMERCIAL AND MARITIME RIGHTS, AND THE PERSONAL LIBERTIES OF OUR CITIZENS IN EXERCISING THEM? * * * Sir, which alternative this House ought to sustain is not for me to say. I hope the decision is made already by a higher authority than the voice of any man. It is not for the human tongue to instill THE SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE AND HONOR. This is the work of nature—a generous nature THAT DISDAINS TAME SUBMISSION TO WRONGS."

HENRY CLAY

In the same crisis Henry Clay, of Kentucky, spoke the true voice of Our Country when he declared:

"The colors that float from the masthead should be the credentials of our seamen."

Again, said he:

"WHEN DID SUBMISSION TO ONE WRONG INDUCE AN ADVERSARY TO CEASE HIS ENCROACHMENTS ON THE PARTY SUBMITTING?"

MARCY

What American does not recall, with pride, the vigorous State papers of Webster and Marcy and Seward? There was no speculation in those days as to how far our State Department could legally go in vindicating an affront to our flag, or in protecting our citizens from insult or injury. Hear what Marcy said, when Austria endeavored to forcibly arrest Martin Koszta, an Austrian subject who had applied for citizenship in this country, but had not yet become fully naturalized. He was on a visit to Smyrna when he was arrested and

taken aboard an Austrian ship of war. Captain Ingraham, of the American sloop St. Louis, cleared his ship for action and demanded the immediate release of Koszta, and he was delivered up. In the course of the diplomatic correspondence that ensued Marcy, Secretary of State, said:

"Whenever by the operation of the law of nations, an individual becomes clothed with our national character, be he a native-born or naturalized citizen, an exile driven from his early home by political oppression, or an emigrant enticed from it by the hopes of a better fortune for himself and his posterity, he can claim the protection of this government and it may respond to that claim without being obliged to explain its conduct to any foreign power; FOR IT IS ITS DUTY TO MAKE ITS NATIONALITY RESPECTED BY OTHER NATIONS, AND RESPECTABLE IN EVERY QUARTER OF THE GLOBE."

It has been said recently in this country and on high authority that it is the duty of Americans to be neutral in word and deed, aye, even in thought; to fight down any generous response which the significance of the immeasurable struggle, now being waged, may evoke within us.

The principle of democracy may be battling for its life! We must sit still! The cause of civil liberty may be gravely imperiled! We must not cry out, much less lift up our hands!!

MONROE

It was not always thus that our country has stood mute at such a juncture. When Greece in the last century was struggling for her independence against the hateful yoke of Turkish oppression, President Monroe in his message to Congress said, without indirection or concealment of his feelings:

"A strong hope has been long entertained, founded on the heroic struggle of the Greeks, that they would succeed in their contest, and resume their equal station among the nations of the earth. It is believed that the whole civilized world takes a deep interest in their welfare."

DANIEL WEBSTER

This expression from an American President called forth from Webster his immortal salutation to the struggling Greeks. His oration was not neutral according to a later standard, but it was American, and in every line and word of it Our Country spoke. He had no doubt of our right to speak, no doubt that we were vitally interested in the outcome of the struggle, no doubt that it was our duty to make known our attitude.

"We stand," said Webster, "as an equal among nations, claiming the full benefit of the established international law; and it is our duty to oppose, from the earliest to the latest moment, any innovation upon that code which shall bring into doubt or question our own equal and independent rights."

Continuing, he said:

"The asserted right of forcible intervention in the affairs of other nations is in open violation of the public law of the world. What is it to us, it may be asked, upon what principles, or what pretenses the European governments assert a right of interfering in the affairs of their neighbors. The thunder, it may be said, rolls at a distance. The wide Atlantic is between us and danger; and however others may suffer we shall remain safe. I think it is a sufficient answer to this to say, that WE ARE ONE OF THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH; THAT WE HAVE AN INTEREST THEREFORE IN THE PRESERVATION OF THAT SYSTEM OF NATIONAL LAW AND NATIONAL INTERCOURSE WHICH HAS HERETOFORE SUBSISTED, so beneficially to all.

"We have as clear an interest in international law as individuals have in the laws of society. But apart from the soundness of the policy, on the ground of direct interest, we have, Sir, a duty connected with this subject, which I trust we are willing to perform. WHAT DO WE NOT OWE TO THE CAUSE OF CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY? TO THE PRINCIPLE OF LAWFUL RESISTANCE? TO THE PRINCIPLE THAT SOCIETY HAS A RIGHT TO PARTAKE IN ITS OWN GOVERNMENT?"

He continues:

Does it not become us then, IS IT NOT A DUTY IMPOSED ON US, to give our word to the side of liberty and justice, to let mankind know that we are not tired of our own institutions, and TO PROTEST AGAINST THE ASSERTED POWER OF ALTERING AT PLEASURE THE LAW OF THE CIVILIZED WORLD?"

Thus spoke Our Country through the voice of one of her greatest sons, and thus she has ever spoken, even when "the thunder did not roll at such a distance."

SEWARD NOT APPALLED

In one of the darkest hours of the Civil War, our Minister at London sent word to our Secretary of State that he had reason to believe that proposals would be addressed to him by the English ministry looking to intervention. Seward's letter in reply will always be a shining page in the history of Our Country. Although we were engaged in a struggle for the preservation of our national existence, which taxed our strength, and, although the menace proceeded from the greatest power in the world, the voice of Our Country did not falter. Our Minister was told to decline all debate of the question of intervention. If the subject was persisted in, he was told to announce his mission at an end, and to leave England. Said Seward, speaking of this step, which was recognized as involving a rupture with England:

"Its possible consequences have been weighed and its solemnity is therefore felt and freely acknowledged. * * * You will perceive that we have approached the contemplation of that crisis with the caution which great reluctance has inspired. BUT I TRUST THAT YOU WILL ALSO HAVE PERCEIVED THAT THE CRISIS HAS NOT APPALLED US."

Right well and high did Seward carry the standard of his country, and with a firm hand.

OLNEY CAUGHT THE TRUE NOTE

Secretary of State Olney caught the true note of Our Country, in his discussion with Great Britain of the Venezuelan boundary, when he said:

"That there are circumstances under which a nation may justly interpose in a controversy to which two or more other nations are the direct and immediate parties is an admitted canon of international law. If any such right and duty exist, their due exercise and discharge will not permit of any action that shall not be efficient, and that, if the power of the United States is adequate, shall not result in the accomplishment of the end in view."

So has Our Country spoken in the crises of the past. From the beginning of its political existence it has been the champion of the most advanced ideas of natural right and justice. Our Country has always been the recognized upholder of the principles of humanity over tyranny and force. We have stood for the greater reign of reason.

The past is secure. It is characteristic. It is honorable. It fixes a standard and imposes a duty in the present, from which we should not swerve. Has that duty been performed? I wish it were possible to think so.

DOES OUR COUNTRY SPEAK TODAY AS SHE HAS BEEN ACCUSTOMED TO SPEAK IN THE GLORIOUS PAST?

Can we regard ourselves as the champions of civil liberty and of the oppressed? Do security and dignity dwell under the shadow of our flag? Is American citizenship all that it has been in the past, and all that it should be now? Has the true voice of Our Country yet been heard as to the unwarned sinking of defenseless merchantmen, the wanton slaying of women and children at sea, the trampling down of national life, the interruption of our legitimate neutral commerce, the violation of solemn treaties, the substitution of frightfulness for faith?

GRANT

Better than a third or a fourth or a fifth note, from our State Department, each excelling its predecessor in rhetorical finish and dialectical refinement, are, it seems to me, such rugged words as were spoken by Grant at Fort Donelson:

"No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move upon your works immediately."

DIX

Better than long waiting for the corroboration of what is known, for the certification of the obvious and proof of the conceded, in matters where the lives of Americans are involved, and in which our power and disposition to avenge insults to our Nationality are openly derided, better, I say, in tone and substance, is the policy reflected in the famous message sent from the Treasury Department on January 29th, 1861, signed by John A. Dix, Secretary of the Treasury of the United States:

"If any one attempts to haul down the American flag, shoot him on the spot."

HAY-ROOSEVELT

With equal vividness did this true Americanism flash in the more recent message of Secretary of State John Hay during the administration of Theodore Roosevelt:

"We want Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead."

In these days of storm and stress, of trial and doubt, it is well to conjure up these figures from our mighty past. Let us lift up our eyes unto them, as to the hills, whence cometh our strength!